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January 26, 2001

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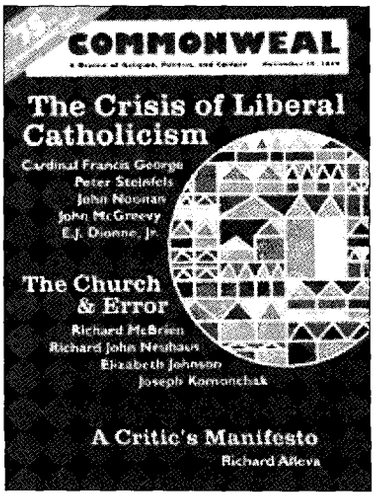

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COMMONWEAL

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To the Editors

Right & Left together

David Beckmann's account (December 15, 2000) of how debt relief for the world's poorest countries captured the attention of both the White House and the Congress is fascinating reading. In over four decades in Washington, I have never seen the like of this kind of alliance for the poor.

Beckmann begins with an account of an October 2 meeting in the White House. That this bipartisan meeting was held at all is astounding. It came, after all, at the height of a campaign for president in which neither George W. Bush nor Al Gore had addressed debt relief as an issue.

What is not clear from Beckmann's account is who played the roles of planner, organizer, convenor, catalyst, and puppet master that brought together for common action the political and religious Right and Left. It is conceivable that Beckmann himself and his Bread for the World staff did.

I have not observed Beckmann closely since he took on the presidency of BFW. But I was very familiar with his work at the World Bank. In every major effort to move a recalcitrant bank closer to poverty alleviation Beckmann was at its center. Although he ranked low in the bank's hierarchy, he became, in a low-key way, its moral conscience on poverty.

Whatever the influence of the Lutheran seminary he attended or Harvard's Graduate School, by the time Beckmann came to the bank he understood the wisdom in the adage that one can accomplish a lot in Washington if willing to let someone else take the credit. Whatever the full story on debt relief, it was a remarkable achievement and may the credit for it sprinkle in abundance right and left across the political landscape.

WILLIAM J. NAGLE
Alexandria, Va.

Flag waving

I very much liked both December 2000 issues, especially that of December 17. The editorial "Votes Count" was the better of the two because it called the result of the presidential election before it had occurred and presented the case with clarity and honesty.

On the other hand, the editorial of December 1 ("Limbo") caused anger and hurt by the unnecessary jingoism of the second paragraph. While it is true that the "rest of the world" was "having a good laugh" at America's expense, that fact did not call for the self-congratulatory reminder that America is the "greatest democractic nation in history." This is clearly debatable.

Further, the comment "Let them laugh" demonstrates a mean-spiritedness that clearly indicates the editorial staff was indeed stung by the electoral ineptitude in Florida.

No one debates that America is currently the most powerful country in the world, both militarily and economically, but this doesn't make it the "greatest democracy." There are many other democracies as great or greater depending on how you measure democracy. *Commonweal* has not hesitated to be critical of the American democratic experience and has frequently advocated needed reform. Clearly the 2000 presidential election has revealed the glaring need for some pretty basic reforms to the electoral process in the United States. I look forward to *Commonweal*'s making amends for its momentary lack of judgment by providing a thoughtful article on how the 2000 debacle can be avoided in future elections.

JOHN BORST
Dryden, Ontario

From the editors: Okay, okay. Canada can be the greatest democracy in the world. May we be second?

"And I got this for not nuking anyone during the entire cold war."

The politics of resentment

Many of us realized on November 8 that a Supreme Court majority was likely to intervene in the Florida election dispute to hand the presidency to George W. Bush. Still we were shocked when five judges violated the trust the nation placed in them to halt the hand recount and effectively give Bush the electoral votes he needed. Richard D. Friedman is right (January 12, 2001) that the decision will live in infamy.

Since the days when Richard M. Nixon and John Mitchell borrowed the politics of resentment from George Wallace, the GOP has learned how to fan—and cash in on—anger. Though highly intelligent and well trained, the five majority justices are human beings who can also be manipulated into sharing an almost enraged mindset. The remarks that Justice Antonin Scalia attached to the order halting the recount looked more like a pro-football player's touchdown dance than the sober words of a dispassionate judge.

The judges were not the only people whose conduct was influenced by this long-term strategy of inflaming

(Continued on page 29)

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Abstinence, anyone?

Strange things do happen. Earlier this month Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, relented after years of obstructionism and allowed the United States to pay its back dues to the United Nations. If Helms can come to terms with the obvious good the UN represents, perhaps "progressive" educators and other advocates of what is called "comprehensive sex education" will one day come to see the virtue and effectiveness of stressing abstinence in public-school sex education. That day has not yet arrived, however.

"Virginity Pledges by Teenagers Can Be Highly Effective, Federal Study Finds," read the surprising (for some) headline in the *New York Times* (January 4). The new study, conducted by Peter Bearman of Columbia University and Christine Bachrach of Yale, concluded that teenagers who took a pledge to abstain from intercourse until marriage "are much *less* likely" to have intercourse than adolescents who did not pledge. "The delay effect is substantial and almost impossible to erase. Taking a pledge delays intercourse for a long time," the study concludes.

The pledge, an idea originating with the Southern Baptist church, has been taken by nearly 3 million American adolescents. Virginity pledges and other "abstinence-only" programs are particularly controversial when implemented in public schools. Federal funding guidelines, stemming from the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, prohibit such programs from providing students with information about contraception.

The debate over the place of moral norms in sex education has long been contentious. The Left is eager to paint abstinence programs as a scheme by the Religious Right to restore traditional gender roles and sexual morality. Some critics even contend that abstinence-only sex education represents an unconstitutional entanglement of church and state! For religious conservatives, schools that provide information about contraception are seen to be enabling immoral behavior. In addition, comprehensive sex education, with its "nonjudgmental" approach to sexual activity outside of marriage, is rejected as a form of indoctrination in pernicious liberal values.

High school students, let alone younger children, should not be engaging in sexual intercourse. The news that abstinence works—even so-called "abstinence-only" programs—should be welcome. The high rates of sexually transmitted disease, HIV, abortion, and unwed motherhood among teenagers in the U.S. has had devastating consequences, especially for young and poor women and their children. However social policy may balance the abstinence message with the provision of contraceptive information, surely abstinence is what most parents and increasingly many professionals think needs to be stressed. Still, the Bearman-Bachrach study has not been greeted with enthusiasm by all. An earlier version of the paper presented at a Planned Parenthood of New York City workshop brought an extraordinary reaction, with the president of SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) leading an "Abstinence programs do not work" chant. In other contexts, such a willful rejection of new knowledge is called obscurantism.

Of course, virginity pledges are not the sole answer to teenage irresponsibly in

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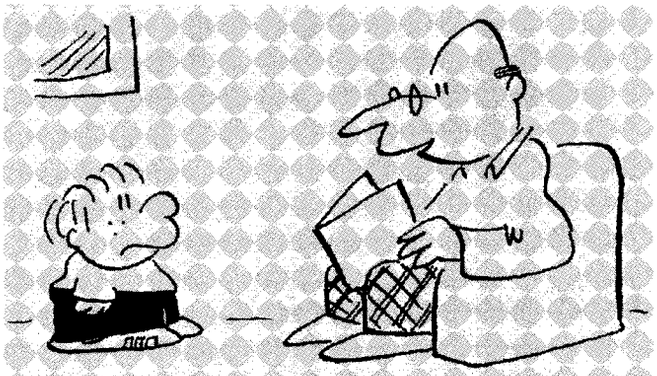

"The facts of life? Certainly—I suppose we should start with simple amino acids..."

matters sexual. The study also found that pledgers are less likely to use contraception than are nonpledgers when they eventually do have intercourse. Obviously no single approach is appropriate for all kids. Bearman and Bachrach carefully note that the pledge works in specific social contexts. The pledge is more effective with younger teenagers (fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds) and loses its effectiveness altogether if taken by too many or too few adolescents in the same social setting. Once again, attitudes toward sex are shown to be deeply embedded in group norms.

Rates of teenage pregnancy have actually declined since the early 1990s. Despite the continuing political antagonism surrounding this issue, a willingness on the part of liberals and conservatives alike to criticize teenage sex and defend the institution of marriage has helped to stem the tide of destructive behavior among the young. A consensus now seems to exist that "abstinence-plus" or "mixed" programs, curriculums that emphasize abstinence but also provide information about contraception, make the most sense. But the emphasis must be placed unambiguously on abstinence. As historians and social critics like Barbara Dafoe Whitehead have pointed out, the "technological" approach to sex education that predominated in the recent past betrayed a gross misunderstanding of the motivations and dynamics behind teenage sexual activity. Information alone does not improve teenage decision making. Children must have a compelling reason to make use of information, and strong moral guidelines can provide such reasons when it comes to sex. As adults know, sex is as much about the will as it is about the body. Despite the allure of sexual libertinism in the media and larger culture, adolescents still want to understand the meaning of love and marriage. That is where any commonsense approach to sex education should start.

Mocking the efforts of religious conservatives to uphold traditional notions of sexual morality and marriage is too easy. Yes, some of the abstinence-only teaching methods are silly and falsely idealize the complex nature of sexual relations. Marriages, obviously, do not always work out. Premarital sex is not a straight road to perdition. But the so-called enlightened or "recreational" model of modern sexuality is no less idealized and even more misleading. Sex can be a fierce force in our lives, and rarely is it more fierce than in adolescence. Religious tradition and social custom have long recognized the disorienting power of sexual desire in the lives of the young by upholding the ideal of faithful, lifelong marriage, and providing boundaries for courtship. That approach is not just sound morality, but as a growing body of social scientific evidence shows, it is also good social policy.

ET CETERAS

The chickens come home ■ Columnist, polemicist, and anti-union ideologue, Linda Chavez withdrew her nomination for secretary of labor in Bush II on January 10 when it became public that in the early nineties, she had taken in an abused Guatemalan woman, an illegal immigrant, and housed her for two years—an altruistic act, apparently one of many. We pondered: Right action for wrong reason? Wrong action for right reason? None of the above?

Certainly other Republicans have done as much as Chavez to help others, and Democrats have too. Many churches in the eighties and nineties offered sanctuary to Central Americans fleeing the violence of war and revolution. However, as we recall, the Reagan and Bush I administrations did not regard the sanctuary movement as altruistic, but pursued and prosecuted people who supported sanctuary. Nor were they always decent to their political opponents, recall Lee Atwater, Bush I campaign strategist. To be sure, Democrats retaliated in kind during the nomination of Clarence Thomas.

Thus Chavez's remarks on her withdrawal were both ironic and sobering. Playing, as she has, the role of both protagonist and victim, she deplored "the politics of personal destruction," and went on to lament the ordeal of the nominating process: "So long as the game in Washington is a game of search and destroy, I think we will have very few people who are willing to do what I did, which was to put myself through this in order to serve." It's too bad she didn't break this circle of destructiveness by urging that her act of personal generosity toward the oppressed be reflected in public policy.

The fullness of football ■ *Commonweal*'s coverage of the Super Bowl has been, er, spotty over the years. That is about to change. This year's game, to be played on January 28, will feature the Baltimore Ravens against the New York Giants. The Ravens, as is well known, are a small heretical sect unable to embrace the full truth of football (especially on offense). The unicity and salvific universality of the Giants are self-evident. As a not-for-profit publication we cannot, of course, endorse either team. In a pluralistic age, many football denominations are free to flourish. But as *Dominus Iesus* reminds us, there is a difference between faith in the Giants and mere belief in other teams. Objectively speaking, other professional football teams are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with the fullness of salvation offered to the Giants fan. Conversion to the Giants cause is what the true football faith requires. Go therefore unto all nations and make them disciples.

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JOHN GARVEY

GIVING DEATH ITS DUE

Christianity's eschatological hope

This past year felt full of death. One of our godchildren, a twelve-year-old girl, died after eight days in the intensive care unit. She had been in an automobile accident. I was with her parents when they got the news that she was unlikely to survive, and was with her and her family when she died. About a month later my mother died. She had been in poor health for some time, but we didn't expect her to die so soon. Her death would have been even more difficult for us if my wife and I hadn't had a wonderful visit with my parents only a few months before. There were other deaths as well, but these two were especially difficult. With our goddaughter there was the sorrow of a young life ended, and the knowledge that the lives of her parents and brother were now tragically changed forever. My sorrow over my mother's death involved my father's sorrow, of course, as well as my own knowledge that I won't see her again, not before my own death anyway; and I found myself, as I am sure everyone does, thinking of all those things I wanted to ask her about her girlhood, her grandparents, her uncle, the town she lived in and what it was like when she was growing up there...

One thing I noticed during this time was how infuriating the language surrounding death can be. The young girl's family were members of our parish, and we are a small enough community so that almost everyone knew them. It may be peculiarly American, but when people discussed her death I often heard the question, "When do you think the family will get over it?" Remembering my own little sister's death and its effect on my family, thinking of my mother's death, I said, "Never. They may learn eventually to live with it, but they will not get over it." It is not as if grief were a kind of disease which passes. Certainly it has its stages, and some days are harder than others; but it is not a medical phenomenon, or a type of mental illness, or something that is best dealt with therapeutically. The Albanian people who make up a good part of our parish understood this in their bones; many of the Americans seemed not to.

But this is only the latest of the ways in which we avoid death and what it means...or rather, the way we try to impute a meaning to death. There is this medical / therapeutic way. There is a New Age way: "Death is really just a part of life." Not really; as Wittgenstein said, death is not lived through. And there is the nauseating way of sentimental Christian cliches: "God must have needed her there..."

A woman phoned our church recently, desperate because a family friend was dying of cancer, a woman with a young daughter. The caller wanted prayers but she also wanted to talk. "I'm scared of death," she said. "I also have a daughter and I don't know what would happen to her if I died. I'm scared to think of being in that box under the earth forever." Her fear was more honest than the ways we try to avoid the subject or make it pretty.

The fact is that we don't know what death will be like, and we have no way of knowing. We know it separates us from people we loved and people who loved us. As Christians we profess a belief that the relationship in some way truly continues, but we know that we will no longer enjoy their company in the only way we knew it, the way we loved. Hard as it is to say in a culture that wants to make everything rational and pleasant, even as it finds new ways to kill inconvenient people, death is an enemy and we are not meant to be rec-

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onciled to it. Christianity, continuing a tradition found in the Old Testament, associates it with sin: "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Romans 5:12). Jesus weeps at the death of Lazarus, and he begs his father to let the cup of suffering pass him by, if it is at all possible. Instead of telling us that death is all right, just a part of life, Christianity claims that we go through death to resurrection from the dead—in the words of the exultant Orthodox Easter, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life."

It is almost embarrassingly primitive, because we must insist that the way the world is is not the way it was meant to be; at the same time, it will be the way God meant it to be, in God's time. This is beyond anything we can demonstrate, except in the way we live. We are to be witnesses to a time that has not come to fruition. When the church loses its belief in the eschatological vision of the New Testament, or when theologians deal with this as if it were peripheral to more important questions, we move far from the heart of our faith, and from our hope for those who have died, and for ourselves. This hope is illuminated in the words of Colossians 3:4, "When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

E.J. DIONNE Jr.

STILL FIGHTING THE CIVIL WAR?

Ask Ashcroft & Norton about states' rights

Thanks to George W. Bush's two most controversial cabinet nominees, our nation is about to rejoin the issues raised by the Civil War. You might argue that 138 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, and 37 years after the great Civil Rights Act of 1964, there should be no need to reopen settled questions. But apparently, they're not settled. Witness interior secretary-designate Gale Norton's speech on slavery as representing "bad facts" for states' rights advocates, and attorney general-designate John Ashcroft's praise for *Southern Partisan*, a neo-Confederate journal.

Let's, first, toss some red herrings overboard. No one should claim that Norton was defending slavery. She wasn't. And there's ample evidence that Ashcroft is not, as some have charged, a racist. The issues in both these cases are more subtle, but very serious. They are about nothing less than our understanding of our nation's history and the role of the federal government.

It's important to look in detail at exactly what Norton said in that 1996 speech about her first visit to "those Civil War graveyards" in Virginia and her reaction to a monument inscribed "in memory of all the Virginia soldiers who died in defense of the sovereignty of their state." The context was her argument that "bad facts make bad law" and her defense of the Tenth Amendment, which holds that powers not delegated to the federal government are reserved to the states or the people. "It was part of what was supposed to guarantee that our government would remain limited," she said.

Here's the key passage: "Again, we certainly had bad facts in that case where we were defending state sovereignty by defending slavery. But we lost too much. We lost the idea that the states were to stand against the federal government gaining too much power over our lives. That is the point I think we need to reappreciate." States, she said, "need to be able to make their own decisions" so they can "provide that check in our federal system against too much power going to Washington."

Perhaps Norton did not intend to put herself on the side of the Confederacy and the cause of those Virginia soldiers ("*we* certainly had bad facts in that case where *we* were defending sovereignty by defending slavery"). What's clear is that Norton is subordinating the issue of slavery to the cause of states' rights. States' rights, in Norton's formulation, are what matter. Slavery is a mere inconvenience, a case of "bad facts."

For more than a century, our country has moved toward a different view: that the cause of individual human and civil rights matters more than states' rights, and trumps them. The Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 consciously overrode both states' rights and property rights in the interest of human freedom and equal justice. Far from losing too much, we have gained a great deal.

The argument can be extended to environmental protection, the area that would be under Norton's authority at interior. Republican presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Richard Nixon and, yes, the elder George Bush, have supported an active role for the federal government to clean the air and water, and to preserve the wilderness. Norton needs to explain what environmental gains she'd be willing to abandon in the name of states' rights and property rights. Where does she think "we lost too much"?

As for Ashcroft, there is his praise of the magazine *Southern Partisan* for "defending patriots like Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis." There's a lot to be said for regional pride. But Ashcroft went beyond that: "We've got to stand up and speak in this respect, or else we'll be taught that these people were giving their lives, subscribing their sacred fortunes and their honor to some perverted agenda."

Which raises the question: Was slavery not a "perverted agenda"? As Norton argues, the cause of states' rights wasn't being defended during the Civil War purely as an abstraction. It was linked to the right of the states to maintain slavery against the wishes of the federal government. What exactly was Ashcroft trying to say?

These debates matter because it's more "socially acceptable now to flirt with"

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neo-Confederate doctrines, says Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. These doctrines have real-life implications for the future role of the federal government, especially for these nominees in the areas of environmental protection and civil rights. It is they who have put the issues of the Civil War back on the nation's agenda. We can only assume they are serious people who are serious about what they say. It's fair to ask them to explain and defend their positions. □

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George W. Grayson

FOX & THE GOVERNORS

Mexico's new chief needs some help

MEXICO CITY—The nomadic Somalis have forty-five names for the camel because of the dromedary's crucial role in their lives. In contrast, Mexicans have traditionally employed a plethora of terms to mock the self-serving authoritarianism of the nation's thirty-one governors, most of whom emerged from the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). *Tlatoani* (head honcho), *cacique* (boss), and *caudillo* (strongman)—these words glisten on the pages of the derisive gubernatorial lexicon.

But Mexico is changing at a vertiginous pace, as evidenced by the mid-2000 defeat of the PRI presidential standard-bearer by Vicente Fox Quesada, fifty-eight, a member of the center-right National Action Party (PAN). For the first time since its founding in 1929, the PRI no longer holds Los Piños presidential residence. While agreeing to the 2001 federal budget, PRI legislators yearn to derail Fox's bold initiatives aimed at spurring growth, creating jobs, lowering inflation, overhauling the tax system, and expanding energy output. As a result, Mexico's new chief executive may have to turn to the once-disparaged governors to advance his agenda.

Before Fox came roaring into town, the PRI president laid down the law to his party's deputies and senators. True, members of Congress have shown greater independence in recent years, and *priísta* lawmakers groused incessantly about the free-market policies of Ernesto Zedillo, the Yale-trained economist whom Fox succeeded. But when Zedillo and other PRI executives demanded votes for their budgets, tax increases, or favorite projects, legislators dutifully "swallowed toads"—in exchange for patronage and favors.

Although the PRI lost the presidency, it commands 211 seats in the 500-member Chamber of Deputies and 70 seats in the 128-member Senate. Combined with the leftist-nationalist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD)—51 deputies and 15 senators—it can deep-six any of Fox's free-market-oriented proposals.

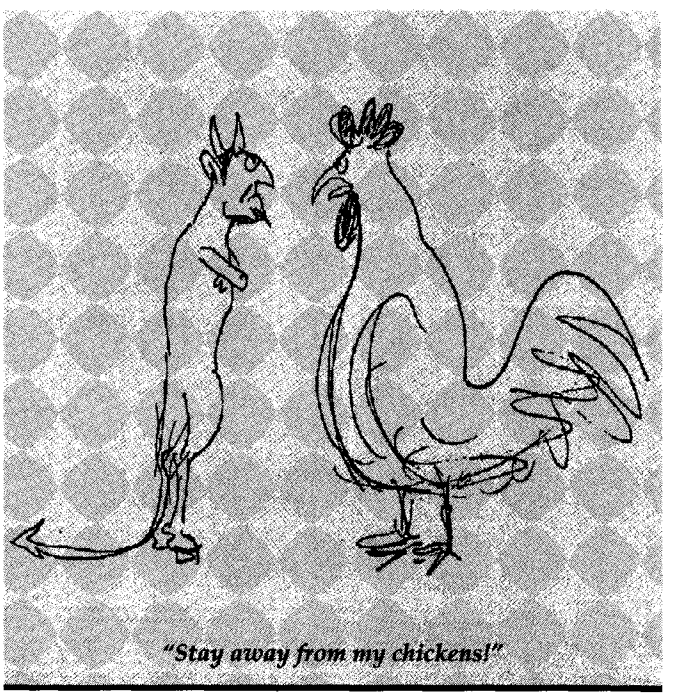
Not only has the PRI lost its big enchilada—and chief legislative strategist—in Los Piños, but it lacks a strong, legitimate party president: someone who could cut deals with Fox and ensure compliance with any accords. The PRD, a mishmash of erstwhile *priístas*, social democrats, Marxists, and ex-guerrillas, is more a Mideastern bazaar than a coherent political organization. In fact, contenders for their respective party leadership posts have unleashed particularly virulent attacks on Fox in hopes of lifting their intraparty stock.

PRI honchos, who treated the presidency as their birthright for seventy-one years, yearn to knee-cap the six-foot-five-inch Fox to bolster their numbers in Congress in 2003 on the way to regaining Los Piños three years later. Several PRD notables, including Mexico City's rabble-rousing populist mayor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, also hope to ascend to the presidency.

The absence of constructive opposition has deprived Fox of a honeymoon. In Congress, the PRI-PRD tandem has flailed him for:

- disrespecting the legislative branch at his swearing-in (December 1) by paying homage to his family before mentioning deputies and senators;
- breaching the wall separating church and state by accepting a cross from his daughter at the close of his first nationally televised address; and
- assertedly shortchanging pensioners and other "have nots."

In clamoring for increased spending on social programs and for retirees, the legislators seemed oblivious to the recent downturn in both oil prices and the U.S. economy—factors that had helped power Mexico's 7-percent growth in



"Stay away from my chickens!"

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GDP in 2000, a figure that may fall to 4 percent this year. Nevertheless, Fox's no-nonsense treasury secretary, who warned that unrealistic demands and bad-faith bargaining could "sink" the nation's economy, quelled Congress with some judicious horse-trading.

The real challenge will come during the March 15–April 30 session. Then Congress will weigh in on the big issues—attracting more private capital into the electricity sector, revamping an antiquated tax system, devolving more resources and programs to state and local governments, and battling corruption.

Mexico-watchers believe that Fox will, à la Bill Clinton, personally court wavering lawmakers to solicit their support for his program. In addition, he would like to have the authority to hold referenda and plebiscites, and will certainly use the bully pulpit of national TV. Analysts have already christened him the "cellular president," because he prefers to travel around the country meeting with folks rather than remain behind an ornate desk in Mexico City. For example, he has continually monitored the danger posed by Popocatépetl, the ash-belching volcano near the capital.

Fox could also enlist corporate moguls, long accustomed to lavishing their time, energy, and resources on the presidential palace during the PRI's top-down rule. They will have to lobby mightily in the halls of Congress on behalf of broadening their nation's version of perestroika.

Still, to be successful Fox needs the PRI and it is the party's governors who can determine the fate of the former businessman-governor's six-year presidential rule. With a handful of exceptions, these men evince far more pragmatism than Congress, and they boast considerable clout with their states' congressional delegations.

The nineteen current PRI governors had an important voice in selecting their party's legislative nominees last year. And since lawmakers are banned from pursuing immediate reelection, state administrations are attractive postlegislative employers—especially for deputies, who serve only three years. Governors can furnish grossly understaffed federal solons with airline tickets, cars, office help, and other perks that U.S. congressmen take for granted.

While some *panistas* in Mexico City are miffed at the small number of cabinet portfolios awarded to their party, the PAN's seven governors share Fox's commitment to breaking legislative logjams to spur growth and employment. Several PRD state executives embrace the same goals, despite the ranting of their legislative comrades. A case in point is Governor Ricardo Monreal of Zacatecas. He is a presidential hopeful who has created a single office to help prospective investors in his picturesque state acquire the federal and state permits needed for their start-ups. In addition, Fox-endorsed "coalition" governors in impoverished, rural Nayarit and Chiapas have also rolled out the red carpet for entrepreneurs.

Partisan differences aside, state leaders have a strong incentive to lend Fox a hand, especially if he moves quickly to provide them with substantially more resources. Like their U.S. counterparts, these men occupy the front line in generating employment, fighting poverty, promoting social services, boosting production, and stimulating exports. Thus, they are vigorously courting new industries, whose profitability will hinge on the additional energy supplies derived from outside investment—an issue that sparks cries of "selling out the *patria*" from nationalists. Fox's Economic Ministry can steer prospective investors to the states of cooperative governors; the Finance Ministry, as also the Communications and Transport Ministry, can provide the infrastructure required for their projects; and various agencies can bulldoze the mountainous regulations confronting entrepreneurs.

Opposition leaders will continue to attempt to stymie Fox's agenda. Opportunists in the PRI and PRD may even try to pit workers and peasants against the middle class and the business community. Needless to say, this kind of class warfare, which the PRI actively discouraged during its seven-decade reign, would send chills through financial centers. Fox can head off such divisiveness and score far more wins than losses if he joins with enlightened, no-nonsense state leaders from across the political spectrum. Such teamwork might revive certain words long dormant in Mexico's gubernatorial vocabulary—*liderazgo* (leadership), *legitimidad* (legitimacy), and *inovación* (innovation). □

George W. Grayson *writes frequently on Mexico. He is a professor of government at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.*

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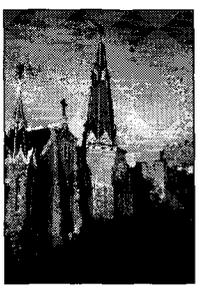

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A DISEMBODIED 'THEOLOGY OF THE BODY'

John Paul II on love, sex & pleasure

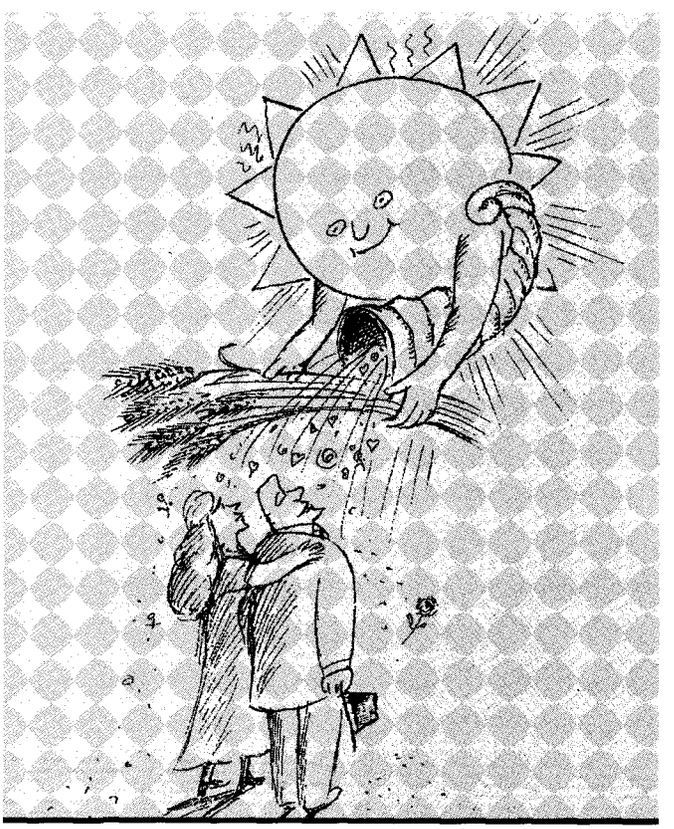
Luke Timothy Johnson

Papal teaching on human sexuality has received some positive reviews recently. A number of these have appeared in the journal *First Things*. In "Contraception: A Symposium" (December 1998), Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., declares that Pope Paul VI has a lock on the title of prophet because, in *Humanae vitae*, he was right. In the same issue, Janet E. Smith thinks that people who regard the papacy's condemnation of contraception to be based on the "artificial" methods employed simply have not acquainted themselves with the richness of papal teaching. In particular, she says, "those who appreciate precise and profound philosophical reasoning should read Karol Wojtyla's *Love and Responsibility*," while offering a strong recommendation also for "the extensive deliberations of Pope John Paul II." Even more recently, Jennifer J. Popiel ("Necessary Connections? Catholicism, Feminism, and Contraception," *America*, November 27, 1999) states that "unlike many women, I find the church's doctrinal statements on contraception and reproduction to be clear and compelling," and argues that Natural Family Planning is fully compatible with feminism, since "only when we control our bodies will we truly control our lives."

George Weigel joins this chorus of praise in his biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope* (Cliff Street Books, 1999). Under the heading, "A New Galileo Crisis," Weigel traces the pope's systematic response to the "pastoral and catechetical failure" of *Humanae vitae* in a series of 130 fifteen-minute conferences at papal audiences beginning on September 5, 1979 and concluding on November 28, 1984. The conferences were grouped into four clusters: "The Original Unity of Man and Woman," "Blessed Are the Pure of Heart," "The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy," and "Reflections on *Humanae vitae*." These talks were brought together under the title *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Pauline Books and Media, 1997).

Weigel himself considers John Paul II's work to be a "theological time bomb" that may take almost a century to appreciate fully, or even assimilate. It "may prove to be the decisive moment in exorcising the Manichaean demon and its deprecation of human sexuality from Catholic moral theology," because the pope takes "embodiedness" so seriously. Weigel considers these conferences to have "ramifications for all of theology," and wonders why so few contemporary theologians have taken up the challenge posed by the pope. He is surprised as well that so few priests preach these themes and only a "microscopic" portion of Catholics seem even aware of this great accomplishment, which he considers to be "a critical moment not only in Catholic theology, but in the history of modern thought." Weigel provides three possible reasons for this neglect: the density of the pope's material, the media's preoccupation with controversy rather than substance, and the fact that John Paul II is himself a figure of controversy. It will take time to appreciate him and his magnificent contribution.

Is Weigel right? Have the rest of us missed out on a theological advance of singular importance? Can the claims made for the pope's *Theology of the Body* be sustained under examination? Recently, I devoted considerable time (and as much consciousness as I could muster) to reading through



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the 423 pages of the collected conferences, and I have reached a conclusion far different from Weigel's. For all its length, earnestness, and good intentions, John Paul II's work, far from being a breakthrough for modern thought, represents a mode of theology that has little to say to ordinary people because it shows so little awareness of ordinary life.

I want to make clear that I am here responding to the theological adequacy of papal teaching. I do not dispute the fact that in some respects papal positions can legitimately be called prophetic. Certainly, John Paul II's call for a "culture of life" in the name of the gospel, against the complex "conspiracy of death" so pervasive in the contemporary world, deserves respect. Likewise, the pope's attention to the "person" and to "continence" stand as prophetic in a time of sexualized identity and rationalized permissiveness. It is small wonder that those worried about moral confusion in matters sexual would want to accept all the papal teachings, since some of them are incontestably correct.

But I want to ask whether we ought to make some distinctions even where the pope does not, whether while approving some of his positions we can also challenge others. Weigel is correct in noting that these conferences are dense and difficult to read—what must they have been like to hear? But Weigel fails to note how mind-numbingly repetitious they are. He does not seem to notice that the pope only asserts and never demonstrates, and that he minimizes the flat internal contradictions among the conferences. For example, on October 1, 1980, the pope declares that a husband cannot be guilty of "lust in his heart" for his wife, but a week later, in the conference of October 8, he states confidently that even husbands can sin in this fashion. But beyond such relatively minor deficiencies (how many theological writings are not dense, repetitious, and inconsistent?), the pope's *Theology of the Body* is fundamentally inadequate to the question it takes up. It is inadequate not in the obvious way that all theology is necessarily inadequate to its subject, and therefore should exhibit intellectual modesty, but in the sense that it simply does not engage what most ought to be engaged in a theology of the body. Because of its theological insufficiency, the pope's teaching does not adequately respond to the anxieties of those who seek a Christian understanding of the body and of human sexuality and practical guidance for life as sexually active adults.

If the pope had only made casual or passing comments on the subject in a homily, then a critical response would be unfair. But everything suggests that John Paul II intended these conferences to be read as a "theology of the body" in the fullest sense of the term "theology." The pope uses academic terms like phenomenology and hermeneutics, refers to contemporary thinkers, provides copious notes, and in the very commitment to the subject over a period of five years in 130 conferences, indicates that he wants his comments to be given serious attention. It is perhaps appropriate to offer a number of observations concerning things that someone far removed from the corridors of doctrinal declaration, but not unschooled theologically, and certainly not disembodied, might want to see yet does not find in John Paul II's discourses.

John Paul II's work, far from being a breakthrough for modern thought, represents a mode of theology that has little to say to ordinary people because it shows so little awareness of ordinary life.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

A starting place is the title itself, which, while perhaps not chosen by the author, legitimately derives from his frequent reference to a "theology of the body" and his constant focus on "human love in the divine plan." Surely, though, an adequate theology of the body must encompass far more than human love, even if that were comprehensively treated! The pope cites 1 Corinthians 6:18 approvingly: "Flee fornication. Every sin a person commits is apart from the body. But the one who fornicates sins in his own body." But Paul's rhetorical emphasis cannot be taken as sober description. Do not the sins of gluttony and drunkenness and sloth have as much to do with the body as fornication, and are not all the forms of avarice also dispositions of the body? Reducing a theology of the body to a consideration of sexuality falsifies the topic from the beginning. Of course, an adequate theological phenomenology of the body as the primordial mystery/symbol of human freedom and bondage must include every aspect of sexuality. But it must also embrace all the other ways in which human embodiedness both enables and limits human freedom through disposition of material possessions, through relationships to the environment, through artistic creativity, and through suffering—both sinful and sanctifying. The pope's title provides the first example of the way in which a grander—or to use his word "vast"—conceptual framework serves to camouflage a distressingly narrow view of things.

The pope's subtitle is "Human Love in the Divine Plan," but no real sense of human love as actually experienced emerges in these reflections. The topic of human love in all its dimensions has been wonderfully explored in the world's literature, but none of its grandeur or giddiness appears in these talks, which remain at a level of abstraction far removed from novels and newspapers with their stories of people like

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us (though not so attractive). John Paul II thinks of himself as doing "phenomenology," but seems never to look at actual human experience. Instead, he dwells on the nuances of words in biblical narratives and declarations, while fantasizing an ethereal and all-encompassing mode of mutual self-donation between man and woman that lacks any of the messy, clumsy, awkward, charming, casual, and, yes, silly aspects of love in the flesh. Carnality, it is good to remember, is at least as much a matter of humor as of solemnity. In the pope's formulations, human sexuality is observed by telescope from a distant planet. Solemn pronouncements are made on the basis of textual exegesis rather than living experience. The effect is something like that of a sunset painted by the unsighted.

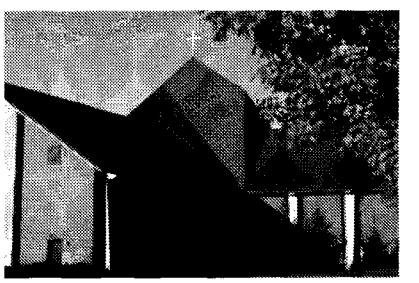
The objection may be made: isn't it proper to base theology in Scripture, and isn't John Paul II correct to have devoted himself so sedulously to the analysis of biblical texts, rather than the slippery and shoddy stuff of experience? Well, that depends on how seriously one takes the Catholic tradition concerning the work of God's Holy Spirit in the world. If we believe—and I think we have this right—that revelation is not exclusively biblical but occurs in the continuing experience of God in the structures of human freedom (see *Dei verbum*, 2.8), then an occasional glance toward human experience as actually lived may be appropriate, even for the magisterium.

As for the pope's way of reading Scripture, the grade is mixed. Certainly he is careful with the texts. Nor does he misrepresent those aspects of the text he discusses in any major way—although he leaves the impression that Matthew's "blessed are the pure of heart" (5:8) refers to chastity, when in fact he knows very well that the beatitude does not have that restricted sense. Even more questionable are the ways John Paul II selects and extrapolates from specific texts without sufficient grounding or explanation. First, he scarcely treats all the biblical evidence pertinent to the subject. His discourses center on a handful of admittedly important passages, with obligatory nods at other texts that might have rewarded far closer analysis, such as the Song of Songs (three conferences) and the Book of Tobit (one). Other important texts are given scant or no attention. A far richer understanding of Paul would have resulted, for example, from a more sustained and robust reading of 1 Corinthians 7, which truly does reveal the mutuality and reciprocity—and complexity—of married love.

Second, John Paul II does not deal with some of the difficulties presented by the texts he does select. For instance, he manages to use Matthew 19:3–9, on the question of marriage's indissolubility, without ever adverting to the clause allowing divorce on the grounds of *porneia* (sexual morality) in both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. What does that exceptive clause suggest about the distance between the ideal "in the beginning" evoked by Jesus, and the hard realities of actual marriages faced by the Matthean (and every subsequent) church?

SAINT MICHAEL'S

GRADUATE THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL MINISTRY



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Naked

I have this to say
about the unclothing of the clothed:
becoming naked is a turnabout
of what is ordered and decreed:
we are told to hide the flesh,
to hitch it to a stitch
or hem: lacking belt, buttons,
trousers and cap the luminous
layer of skin would increase
in splendido and coruscation
and be itself a vestment
and a peak of voluptuousness
and the elephantine seeds
of desire would grow up round
like vines of flame and
the coiled daysprings about
the heart would spin from the
rib cage and be imperial and unappeased
aroused beyond the shipwreck's flat clarion bells.

Ned O'Gorman

Third, for all of his philosophical sophistication, John Paul II seems unaware of the dangers of deriving ontological conclusions from selected ancient narrative texts. He inveighs against the "hermeneutics of suspicion," but the remedy is not an uncritical reading that moves directly from the ancient story to an essential human condition. He focuses on the Yahwist creation account in Genesis 2, because that is the account cited by Jesus in his dispute with the Pharisees concerning divorce (Matt. 19:5), and, I suspect, because its narrative texture—not to mention its human feel—allows for the sort of phenomenological reflection he enjoys. But as the pope certainly understands, this creation account must also be joined to that in Genesis 1 if an adequate appreciation of what Jesus meant by "from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8) is to be gained. If Genesis 1—which has God creating humans in God's image as male and female—had been employed more vigorously, certain emphases would be better balanced. John Paul II wants, for example, to have the term "man" mean both male and female. But the Genesis 2 account pushes him virtually to equate "man" with "male," with the unhappy result that males experience both the original solitude the pope wants to make distinctively human as well as the dominion over creation expressed by the naming of animals. Females inevitably appear as "helpers" and as complementary to the already rather complete humanity found in the male. Small wonder that in virtually none of his further reflections on sexuality do women appear as moral agents: Men can have lust in the hearts but not women; men can struggle with concupiscence but apparently women do not; men can exploit their wives sexually but women can't exploit their husbands sexually.

Such tight focus on male and female in the biblical account also leaves out all the interesting ways in which human sexuality refuses to be contained within those standard gender designations, not only biologically but also psychologically and spiritually. What appears in the guise of description serves prescription: human love and sexuality can appear in only one approved form, with every other way of being either sexual or loving left out altogether. Is it not important at least to acknowledge that a significant portion of humans—even if we take a ludicrously low percentage, at least tens of millions—are homosexual? Are they left outside God's plan if they are not part of the biblical story? Would not an adequate phenomenology of human sexuality, so concerned with "persons," after all, rather than statistics, take with great seriousness this part of the human family, who are also called to be loving, and in many fashions to create and foster the work and joy of creation?

Even within this normative framework, out of all the things that might be taken up and discussed within married love and the vocation of parenting, John Paul II's conferences finally come down to a concentration on "the transmission of life." By the time he reaches his explicit discussion of *Humanae vitae*, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that every earlier textual choice and phenomenological reflection has been geared to a defense of Paul VI's encyclical. However, there is virtually nothing in this defense that is strengthened by the conferences preceding it.

WHAT THE POPE LEAVES OUT

John Paul II is certainly to be appreciated for trying to place the knotty and disputed questions concerning procreation into a more comprehensive theology of the body. But there are a number of things lacking in these conferences and in the various declarations of the pope's apologists. I will simply list some obvious ones without development.

Most important, I would like to see a greater intellectual modesty, not only concerning the "facts" of revelation but also with the "facts" of human embodiedness. In everything having to do with the body, we are in the realm of what Gabriel Marcel called mystery. The body does not present a series of problems that we can solve by detached analysis. The body rather is mystery in two significant ways. First, we don't understand everything about the body, particularly our own body. The means by which we reveal ourselves to others and unite lovingly with others is not unambiguous. The body reveals itself to thought but also conceals itself from our minds. Second, we cannot detach ourselves from our bodies as though they were simply what we "have" rather than also what we "are." We are deeply

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implicated and cannot distance ourselves from the body without self-distortion. Our bodies are not only to be schooled by our minds and wills; they also instruct and discipline us in often humbling ways. Should not a genuine "theology of the body" begin with a posture of receptive attention to and learning from our bodies? Human bodies are part of God's image and the means through which absolutely everything we can learn about God must come to us.

In this regard, I find much of contemporary talk about "controlling our bodies" exactly contrary to such humility, whether such language derives from technocrats seeking to engineer reproductive processes or from naturalists who seek the same control through continence. I am not suggesting that a lack of continence or temperance is a desirable goal. But self-control is not the entire point of sexual love; celibacy is not the goal of marriage! And it may help to remember, in all this talk of controlling the body, that Dante assigned a deeper place in hell to the cold and the cruel than to the lustful. It can be argued, especially from the evidence of this century, that more evil has been visited upon us by various Stalins of sexless self-control than by the (quickly exhausted) epicures of the erotic. Recognition of the ways in which we suffer, rather than steer, our bodies is a beginning of wisdom.

Along these lines, I would welcome from the pope some appreciation for the goodness of sexual pleasure—any bodily pleasure, come to think of it! Pleasure is, after all, God's gift also. A sadly neglected text is 1 Timothy 6:17, where God supplies us all things richly for our enjoyment. Sexual passion, in papal teaching, appears mainly as an obstacle to authentic love. Many of us have experienced sexual passion as both humbling and liberating, a way in which our bodies know quicker and better than our minds, choose better and faster than our reluctant wills, even get us to where God apparently wants us in a way our minds never could. Along the same lines, papal teaching might find a good word to say about the sweetness of sexual love—also, I think, God's gift. Amid all the talk of self-donation and mutuality, we should also remember, "plus, it feels good." Come to think of it, why not devote some meditation to the astonishing triumph of sexual fidelity in marriage? Faithfulness, when it is genuine, is the result of a delicate and attentive creativity between partners, and not simply the automatic product of "self-control." In short, a more adequate theology of the body would at least acknowledge the positive ways in which the body gifts us by "controlling" us.

As with pleasure so with pain. A theology of the body ought to recognize the ways in which human sexual existence is difficult: how arduous and ambiguous a process it is for any of us to become mature sexually; how unstable and shifting are our patterns of sexual identity; how unpredictable and vagrant are our desire and craving, as well as our revulsion and resistance; how little support there is for covenanted love in our world; how much the stresses of

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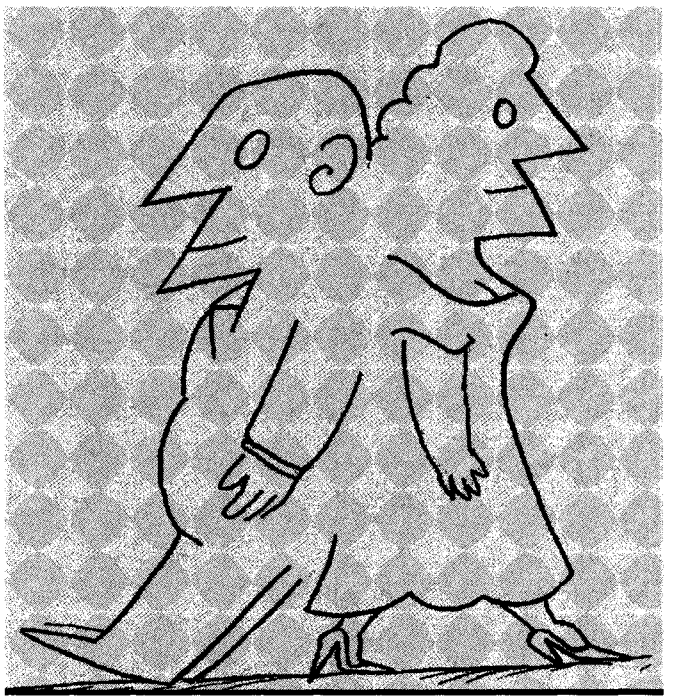
life together—and apart—bear upon our sexual expression. John Paul II and his apologists seem to think that concupiscence is our biggest challenge. How many of us would welcome a dose of concupiscence, when the grinding realities of sickness and need have drained the body of all its sap and sweetness, just as a reminder of being sentient! I would welcome the honest acknowledgment that for many who are married the pleasure and comfort of sexual love are most needed precisely when least available, not because of fertility rhythms, but because of sickness and anxiety and separation and loss. For that matter, a theology of the body ought to speak not only of an "original solitude" that is supposedly cured by marriage, but also of the "continuing solitude" of those both married and single, whose vocation is not celibacy yet whose erotic desires find, for these and many other reasons, no legitimate or sanctified expression, and, in these papal conferences, neither recognition nor concern.

The pope does not examine these and many other aspects of the body and of "human love in the divine plan." Instead, the theology of the body is reduced to sexuality, and sexuality to "the transmission of life." The descent to biologism is unavoidable. What is needed is a more generous appreciation of the way sexual energy pervades our interpersonal relations and creativity—including the life of prayer!—and a fuller understanding of covenanted love as life-giving and sustaining in multiple modes of parenting, community building, and world enhancement.

REVISITING 'HUMANAE VITAE'

John Paul II's conferences and the recent articles I have quoted have meant to defend the correctness of *Humanae vitae,* but paradoxically they remind readers with any historical memory how flawed that instrument was, and how badly it



is in need of a fundamental revisiting. George Weigel calls it a "pastoral and catechetical failure," as though the encyclical's deficiencies were merely those of tone or effective communication. John Paul II's biblical reflections, in fact, appear as nothing less than a major effort to ground *Humanae vitae* in something more than natural law; an implicit recognition of the argumentative inadequacy of Paul VI's encyclical. As my earlier comments indicate, I would judge his success as slight. It would be a weary business to take up the entire encyclical again, but it is important at least to note five major deficiencies that require a genuinely theological response rather than enthusiastic or reluctant apology.

In these comments, I will speak of "artificial birth control" only in terms of using a condom, diaphragm, or other mechanical device, mainly because I have considerable unease concerning chemical interventions and their implications for women's long-term health.

First, the encyclical represents a reversion to an act-centered morality, ignoring the important maturation of moral theology in the period leading up to and following Vatican II, which emphasized a person's fundamental dispositions as more defining of moral character than isolated acts. I am far from suggesting that specific acts are not morally significant. But specific acts must also be placed within the context of a person's character as revealed in consistent patterns of response. The difference is critical when the encyclical and John Paul II insist that it is not enough for married couples to be open to new life; rather, every act of intercourse must also be open, so that the use of a contraceptive in any single act in effect cancels the entire disposition of openness. But this is simply nonsense. I do not cancel my commitment to breathing when I hold my breath for a moment or when I go under anesthesia. Likewise, there is an important distinction to be maintained between basic moral dispositions and single actions. The woman who kills in self-defense (or in defense of her children) does not become a murderer. The focus on each act of intercourse rather than on the overall dispositions of married couples is morally distorting.

Second, the arguments of Paul VI and John Paul II sacrifice logic to moral brinkmanship. When Paul VI equated artificial birth control and abortion, he not only defied science but also provoked the opposite result of the one he intended. He wanted to elevate the moral seriousness of birth control but ended by trivializing the moral horror of abortion. Similarly, from one side of the mouth, John Paul II recognizes two ends of sexual love, unitive intimacy and procreation. But from the other side of his mouth he declares that if procreation is blocked, not only that end has been canceled but also the unitive end as well. He has thereby, despite his protestations to the contrary, simply reduced the two ends to one. This can be shown clearly by applying the logic in reverse, by insisting that sexual intercourse that is not a manifestation of intimacy or unity also cancels the procreative end of the act.

Third, the position of the popes and their apologists continues to reveal the pervasive sexism that becomes ever more

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obvious within official Catholicism. I have touched above on the way John Paul II's reading of Scripture tends to reduce the moral agency of women within the marriage covenant and sexual relationships. This becomes glaringly obvious in the argument that artificial birth control is wrong because it tends to "instrumentalize" women for men's pleasure by making the woman a passive object of passion rather than a partner in mutuality. Yet the argument makes more experiential sense in reverse. Few things sound more objectifying than the arguments of the natural family planners, whose focus remains tightly fixed on biological processes rather than on emotional and spiritual communication through the body. The view that "openness to life" is served with moral integrity by avoiding intercourse during fertile periods (arguably times of greatest female pleasure in making love) and is not served (and becomes morally reprehensible) by the mutual agreement to use a condom or diaphragm, would be laughable if it did not have such tragic consequences. And what could be more objectifying of women than speaking as though birth control were something that only served male concupiscence? How about women's moral agency in the realm of sexual relations? Don't all of us living in the real world of bodies know that women have plenty of reasons of their own to be relieved of worries about pregnancy for a time and to be freed for sexual enjoyment purely for the sake of intimacy and even celebration?

I would welcome from the pope some appreciation for the goodness of sexual pleasure—any bodily pleasure, come to think of it!

Fourth, the absolute prohibition of artificial birth control becomes increasingly scandalous in the face of massive medical realities. One might want to make an argument that distributing condoms to teenagers as a part of sex education is mistaken, but that argument, I think, has to do with misgivings concerning sex education—and a general culture of permissiveness—as a whole. But what about couples who can no longer have sexual relations because one of them has innocently been infected by HIV, and not to use a condom means also to infect the other with a potentially lethal virus? When does "openness to life" in every act become a cover for "death-dealing"? Given the fact that in Africa AIDS affects tens of millions of men, women, and children (very many of them Christian), is the refusal to allow the use of condoms (leaving aside other medical interventions and the changing of sexual mores) coming dangerously close to assisting in genocide? These are matters demanding the most careful consideration by the church, and the deepest compassion. It is difficult to avoid the sense that the failed logic supposedly marshaled in the defense of life is having just the opposite result. If the political enslavement of millions of Asians and Europeans led the papacy to combat the Soviet system in the name of compassion, and if the enslavement and murder of millions of Jews led the papacy to renounce the anti-Semitism of the Christian tradition in the name of compassion, should not compassion also lead at the very least to an examination of logic, when millions of Africans are enslaved and killed by a sexual pandemic?

Fifth, and finally, shouldn't *Humanae vitae* be revisited rather than simply defended for the same reasons that it was a "pastoral and catechetical" failure the first time around? It failed to convince most of its readers not least because its readers knew that Paul VI spoke in the face of the recommendations of his own birth-control commission. The encyclical was, as Weigel calls it, a "new Galileo crisis," not simply because it pitted papal authority against science, but also because the papacy was wrong both substantively and formally. It generated an unprecedented crisis for papal authority precisely because it was authority exercised not only apart from but also in opposition to the process of discernment. Sad to say, John Paul's theology of the body, for all its attention to Scripture, reveals the same deep disinterest in the ways the experience of married people, and especially women (guided by the Holy Spirit, as we devoutly pray) might inform theology and the decision-making process of the church. If papal teaching showed signs of attentiveness to such experience, and a willingness to learn from God's work in the world as well as God's word in the tradition, its pronouncements would be received with greater enthusiasm. A theology of the body ought at least to have feet that touch the ground.

Since God is the Living One who continuously presses upon us at every moment of creation, calling us to obedience and inviting us to a painful yet joyous quest of wisdom, theology must be inductive rather than deductive. Our reading of Scripture not only shapes our perceptions of the world, but is in turn shaped by our experiences of God in the fabric of our human freedom and in the cosmic play of God's freedom. Theology that takes the self-disclosure of God in human experience with the same seriousness as it does God's revelation in Scripture does not turn its back on tradition but recognizes that tradition must constantly be renewed by the powerful leading of the Spirit if it is not to become a form of falsehood. Theology so understood is a demanding and delicate conversation that, like sexual love itself, requires patience as well as passion. If we are to reach a better theology of human love and sexuality, then we must, in all humility, be willing to learn from the bodies and the stories of those whose response to God and to God's world involves sexual love. That, at least, is a starting point. □

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Rand Richards Cooper

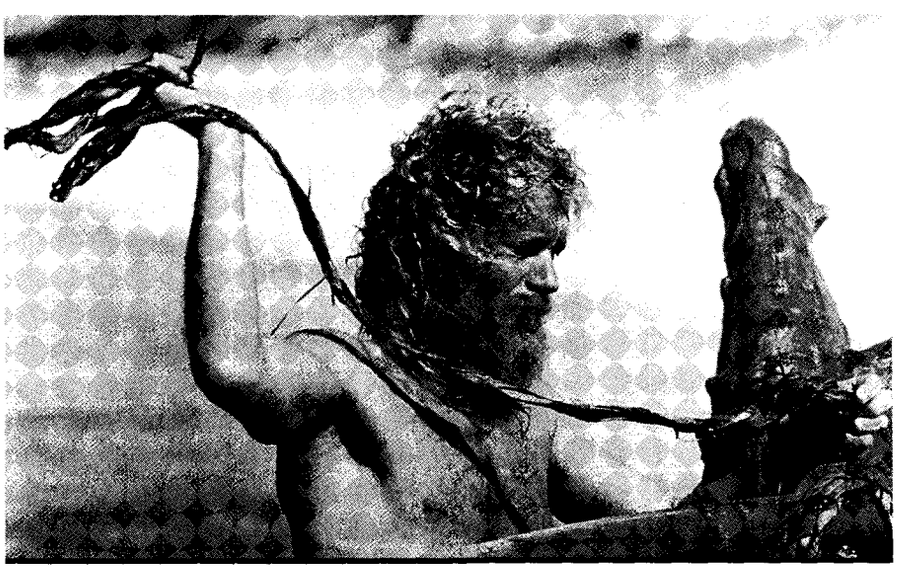
SURVIVORS

'Cast Away' & 'You Can Count on Me'

Director Robert Zemeckis has made all sorts of films in his charmed career—offbeat comedies (*Used Cars*), thrillers (*What Lies Beneath*), slick adventures (*Romancing the Stone*), and megahits (*Forrest Gump*). While you may not always like his material, Zemeckis's command of the medium is masterly, and never more so than in *Cast Away*, his retelling of the Robinson Crusoe fable, starring Tom Hanks as Chuck Noland, a FedEx manager whose hubris lands him marooned on a Pacific island. The film's flashy opening follows a package delivered from an isolated Texas crossroads halfway round the globe to Moscow—brisk strokes that orchestrate action and exposition, set up character, and foreshadow events to come. What looks like an ad for Fedex is really a bravura critique of the new world order, with FedEx an empire flying its purple and orange colors, and Noland its Patton, haranguing glum conscripts about what a shipshape new office he's going to run. Efficiency is Noland's mantra, and the arrogance of his pep talk, its snappy brutality, can't be missed.

Noland may be a nice enough guy, but being nice is what he does in his spare time. Noland is too busy to worry much about a colleague whose wife is battling cancer; he can barely pause for his own personal life. Paged away from a family Christmas dinner in Memphis, he rushes to catch a cargo flight across the Pacific, hurriedly presenting a ring-sized box to his fiancée, Kelly (Helen Hunt). His career is swallowing him up, but Zemeckis and his screenwriter, William Broyles Jr., let us know that Noland likes it that way. Confident, talented, brash, he's an avatar of American triumphalism—the indispensable person in the indispensable nation, who can do Christmas, propose to his girlfriend, and jet off to fix another glitch in the global consumer circuitry. His life isn't a tragedy; it's a commercial. "I'll be right back," he says to Kelly, and you find yourself wishing something would happen to mess him up a little.

Well, but maybe not *this* much. The FedEx cargo jet Noland's riding in goes down in a mammoth storm over the Pacific; at sunrise he washes up, a lone survivor on a tiny deserted island. From here on, *Cast Away* abjures music in favor of the wind and the rain and the ceaseless crash of waves, and Don Burgess's camera, panning from atop the island's highest point, captures the magnificent inhumanity of nature. Meanwhile, Noland's desperate struggle to learn survival skills jolts us from our usual valuings of things. When the corpse of one of the pilots washes up two days after the crash, there's anguish and horror, but a small inner voice exulting, "Shoes!" FedEx packages wash up as well, and Noland opens them. Ice skates, you think, how useless on a tropical island, how ironic, until your eye wanders to the blades. The film keeps subtly shifting us from irony to urgency.



Hankering to get away

Hanks tenders his usual terrific work. Among marquee actors he has a matchless gift for inwardness. On the island, he shows how Noland's bellowing rage at his helplessness yields to giddy euphoria at finally mastering fire. Then there's the ballyhooed physical transformation. Noland's stay on the island lasts more than four years, and Zemeckis shot *Cast Away* with a year break in the middle, to allow Hanks to shrink three body sizes and grow a tangled, leonine mane and beard. The environment has remorselessly, efficiently shaped him—and lent a nifty new skill set, too. You haven't seen anyone throw the javelin this accurately since Rafer Johnson. As for his other gear, one of the washed-up FedEx packages yields a volleyball, which, with a face painted in Noland's own blood, becomes his talisman and companion, which he names Wilson (after the brand name). At first you think Zemeckis is just being cute, but the interaction deepens gradually, culminating in Noland's choked remorse when in anger he hurls the ball into raging surf, then goes plunging after it, wailing, "Never again, Wilson." It's a big gamble, putting this much on a volleyball, and it pays off, the very grotesqueness of the emotions delineating our irrepressible human need for love and company. Zemeckis is not a director known for making his audiences uncomfortable, and doing so here elevates his film to a new level.

Cast Away doesn't quite know what

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to do when it leaves the island. But if it seems bewildered, like Noland himself, by the return to civilization, we nevertheless feel sufficiently harrowed by now to credit the haunted look on Hanks's face. Zemeckis wisely leaves open the question of whether Noland will be better off for having been made to face his own helpless humanity.

Scottsville, New York, isn't as isolated as a Pacific island; it just feels like it. Steep hills and valleys, a main street with a few side spurs to nowhere: it's the kind of town where the vast spaces between tables in a restaurant remind you that upstate New York more closely resembles Alaska than Manhattan. Nearby, in a hillside graveyard, lie the parents of Samantha (Laura Linney) and Terry Prescott (Mark Ruffalo), killed in a car accident when Sam and Terry were kids. Twenty years later, Samantha is a harried single mom, Terry a troubled drifter. Their tender, tempestuous reunion forms the subject of Kenneth Lonergan's superb debut film, *You Can Count on Me*.

Without being heavy-handed, Lonergan sketches symmetrical brother-and-sister responses to the shared family trauma. Terry is the eternal adolescent, an impetuous, abrasive pothead who makes a mess of everything. Samantha, meanwhile, spends her days doggedly keeping the family house spic-and-span, managing her cute eight-year-old-son, Rudy (Rory Culkin), and dealing with her blandly overbearing new boss (Matthew Broderick) at the bank. She smiles, she copes; but where's the fun? Her on-again-off-again boyfriend, Bob, is a handsome dud; when she calls him and asks, "What are you wearing right now?" he answers with a nervous, "Mom?" Samantha works hard to keep things running, and to be fair and polite; but beneath the surface lies a long-suppressed instinct for stirring the pot; and once she gets going, her life veers pleasingly out of control, in a way Lonergan makes clear is probably good for her. She needs a dash of her brother, just as he needs a dose of her.

You Can Count on Me is a determinedly small movie. Suspense consists in wondering whether unreliable Terry will pick Rudy up from school as promised, and pathos in watching him bury himself in a Gameboy while Samantha tries to spill her heart out. For comedy, there's Sam visiting her minister, writhing in guilt about having two lovers and cheating on both, only to discover that the minister doesn't believe in sin; he wants to understand. It's funny, in a daily, utterly real way. Lonergan, a playwright, has a fine ear for dialogue and a feel for sibling drama—how hope springs eternal, and disappointment too. *You Can Count on Me* is a feast for its two lead actors. Laura Linney resembles a cross between Meryl Streep and Renée Zellweger, and emotions play rapidly across her handsome, protean face. Mark Ruffalo's Terry is sulky and self-righteous, and thoroughly infuriating. But then he does something to redeem himself, and in spite of yourself you start to like him, at least until his next blunder.

Watching a film like this is like reading a good contemporary realist novel or short story. It gives us people in their wholeness, acting on mixed motives, riding the daily rollercoaster of hopes, regrets, spats, and plain old goofs. It allows sympathetic characters a nasty impulse and obnoxious ones a moment of shaky grace, and discovers joys and sorrows triggered not by grand events, but innocuous ones, like how your little boy, angry at you, pours a whole bottle of maple syrup all over his plate and ruins your morning. What is it, exactly, that a small movie like this feels like? Like life. □

"Listen . . . with the ear of your heart" - Rule of Benedict, Prologue

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Benjamin Ivry

THE CAT DECIDES

The music of John Tavener

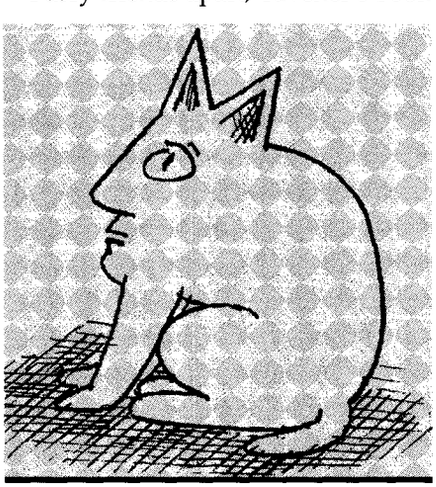
British composer John Tavener, fifty-six, is one of the most remarkable classical music success stories in recent years. His 1989 work for cello and orchestra, *The Protecting Veil*, inspired by the Orthodox feast of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God, has become an international chart-topper, with over six CD recordings to date. His elegiac *Song for Athene* was performed at the funeral service of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997. Now Tavener's book, *The Music of Silence: A Composer's Testament*, has been published by Faber & Faber, describing the unexpected trajectory of his life and work.

A prodigy pianist, young Tavener also studied conducting, and was accomplished enough to lead performances of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* at London's Covent Garden at age twenty-four. But composition was always his main love. He created a number of avant-garde works, involving taped children's voices and other devices, which were admired by 1960s Londoners, including the Beatles, who released some of his music on their Apple Records label. An early opera, *Thérèse* (1979), was an impressionistic view of the significance of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, which juxtaposed the Little Flower with her contemporary, the French poet Rimbaud. In 1976 Tavener had entered the Russian Orthodox church—although he has since lived part of each year in Greece and considers himself closer to Greek Orthodoxy. His subsequent works reflect this decisive change.

Tavener began to call his works musical icons, and he's said that the "voice of God" spoke in them. The "icons" poured out in great volume, with total ease. Instead of the plethora of ideas in his earlier works, Tavener scaled back to a minimalist-style repetition of very few ideas and a static-sounding musical texture. Although his latter-day works have been compared to those of Arvo Pärt and Henryk Gorecki, both best-selling minimalists, Tavener's music is different because of its immediate sweet-sounding appeal. On a recent recording for Cala, the BBC Singers perform choral works like *The Lamb* and *The Tiger*—both written to poems by William Blake—and the hit *Song for Athene*. All are soothing and tension-free, with a lulling effect that is perilously close to easy-listening. *New Yorker* critic Andrew Porter, usually a strong booster of modern music, decried Tavener's "Mantovani string sonorities," calling him more sentimental than Massenet. Porter pointed to an essential paradox: if a composer feels his music is dictated by the divine, how can much-needed self-criticism ever occur? Tavener's *Music of Silence* addresses this question in its own way.

As quirky and confounding a British eccentric as any composer since the late Michael Tippett, Tavener disarms criticism by stating that he can tell if one of his works-in-progress is not developing well "by looking at the cat." His domestic feline reveals any imbalance in the cosmos that a note out of place might signify. He adds: "There is something deeply mysterious about cats. I think they 'know' things we don't have access to."

Furry friends apart, Tavener's book also expresses his loathing for bugaboos like "the angry, tortured face" of Arnold Schoenberg as well as that composer's "rotting humanism and his humanly contrived techniques." A more disquieting anger is expressed in his mention of a vocal setting, at age fifteen, of Donne's "Spit in my face you Jewes, and pierce my side, / Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie me." Although describing this as a "very severe text for somebody of fifteen to be attracted to," Tavener does not reflect on its anti-Semitic implications. Indeed, in a new choral work, *Total Eclipse*, to be released next spring by Harmonia Mundi records, a rudely blaring saxophone represents the villainous "Synagogue," according to the composer, still oblivious to anti-Semitic metaphor years after his Donne setting.



Apart from the ideological risks of assuming a mantle of ancient belief, there is the question of aesthetic results. When performed plainly and unassumingly, as by the BBC singers or by the Scottish Ensemble (on Linn), Tavener's work can make appealing listening. Precise artists like cellist Yo-Yo Ma and conductor David Zinman have made a lucid concert-hall recording of *The Protecting Veil* (Sony) that avoids many of the work's sentimental pitfalls. But Tavener has expressed the wish that his work be performed in cathedrals, where the soupier acoustics do not flatter his already vague-sounding, facile harmonies. Thus a whole program of vocal works performed in Westminster Abbey (Sony) makes one understand how music critic Andrew Porter can compare listening to Tavener to enjoying "a good old wallow." Whether one believes the widespread journalistic praise of Tavener—one British headline boosted him as a "Rebel with a Medieval Cause"—there is evidence that his musical gifts remain intact. If there are some quibbles about how he chooses to exercise them at the moment, there is always hope that his cat may speak up and correct any current excesses. □

Benjamin Ivry *is author of biographies of Ravel (Welcome Rain), Poulenc (Phaidon), and Rimbaud (Absolute Press). His poetry collection,* Paradise for the Portuguese Queen, *was published by Orchises Press.*

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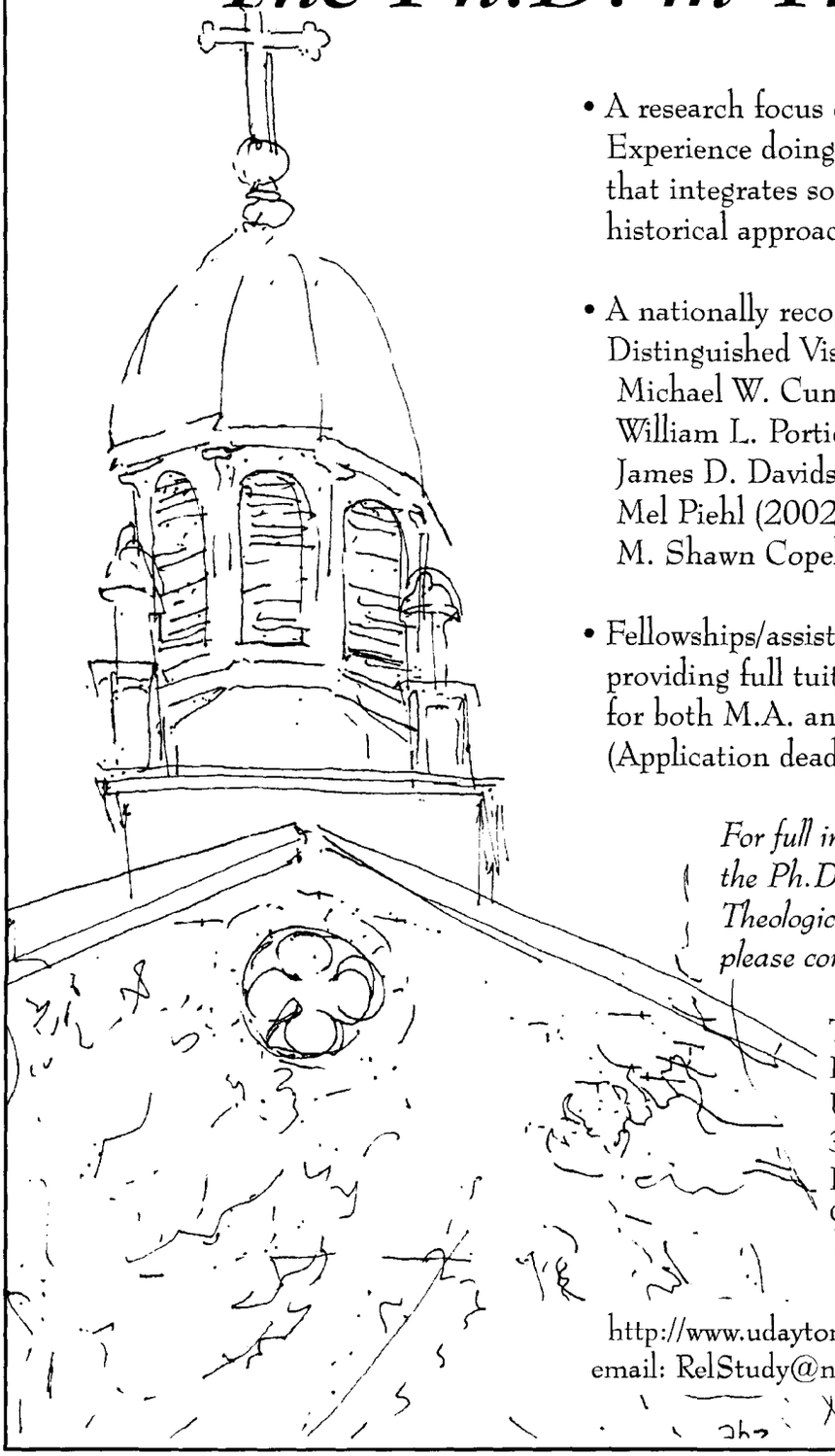

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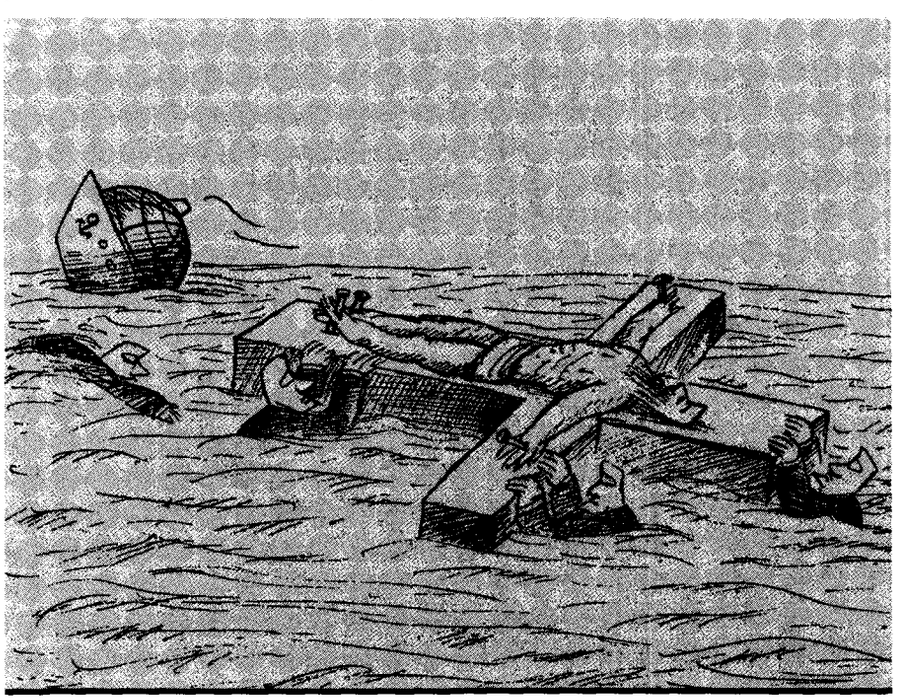
Dismantling the Cross

Constantine's Sword
The Church and the Jews: A History
James Carroll
Houghton Mifflin, $28, 756 pp.

Robert Louis Wilken

Novelist and National Book Award winner James Carroll claims that *Constantine's Sword* is a work of history, and he even uses the term in his subtitle. But it is evident from the outset and amply displayed in chapter after chapter that the word "history" is a euphemism. This is a book driven by theological animus and padded with irrelevant, distracting material from Carroll's own obsessively chronicled life. Too many pages of the book are self-absorbed meditations on the author's likes (Bob Dylan, John XXIII) and dislikes (Cardinal Francis Spellman and Pius XII), all delivered with pompous solemnity ("I presume to measure the sweep of history against the scope of my own memory"). The book is filled with information, much of it familiar. Carroll bases his narrative almost wholly on the works of others. If one turns to the notes to check the basis for his comments, the most frequent phrase one finds is "quoted by" whether the passage be from Rosemary Radford Ruether, Salo Baron, Marc Saperstein, Hans Küng, John Cornwell, or others. In a work of such scope it is inevitable that one will have to rely on the scholarship of others, but Carroll displays little understanding of the ambiguities or shortcomings of his sources. *Constantine's Sword* is a six-hundred-page indictment of the church for its attitudes toward and treatment of the Jews, deploying historical information to support its accusations. It is an effort not to understand but to use history to advance a tendentious agenda.



The central thesis can be stated simply: "Auschwitz is the climax of the story that begins at Golgotha. Just as the climax of *Oedipus Rex*...reveals that the hubris that drove the play's action was itself the flaw that shaped the king's character, so we can...say that Auschwitz, when seen in the links of causality, reveals that the hatred of Jews has been no incidental anomaly but a central action of Christian history, reaching to the core of Christian character."

Though the author shifts repeatedly from recent events (even Matthew Shepard, the young gay man who was murdered in Wyoming in 1998, appears) and his own experiences to ancient and medieval times, the material in *Constantine's Sword* breaks down into three large historical periods: Christian beginnings and the early church; the Middle Ages through the Reformation; and the modern age, beginning with the Enlightenment and ending with Pius XII and Edith Stein. At the end Carroll appends a wordy fifty-page proposal for the future titled "A Call for Vatican III" and an epilogue, "The Faith of a Catholic."

The first section argues that a fatal mistake was made at the very beginning of Christianity. Following the thinking of Ruether, Carroll adopts the view that Christian contempt for the Jews is derived from Christology, in particular the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. Because most Jews did not accept Jesus as Messiah, rejection of the Jews became a defining characteristic of orthodox Christianity. This leads Carroll to conclude that the "death camps are causally linked through two millennia to mistakes made

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by the first generation of Christians." Hence Christianity is inherently anti-Semitic and the only way forward for the church is "a revision of what we believe about Jesus." The church needs to recover the Jesus who lived before Christians imposed an alien creed on his life and teachings, the Jesus who preached a message of love of the God who created not just one group but all human beings.

With this as foundation, Carroll proceeds to Constantine and the church fathers. His aim is to show that Christianity's fatal flaw (its belief in the uniqueness of Christ) now takes social and institutional form. But Carroll's evidence is thin and largely rhetorical (especially sermons), not legal or social. Jewish life went on uninterrupted across the Roman Empire, new synagogues were constructed, and Jewish cultural life flourished. In this period Christians were rivals to the Jews, not oppressors. To be sure, the rhetoric of the church fathers is sometimes extreme (the synagogue is called "a haunt of infidels," "home of the impious," "under the damnation of God"), and when ancient sermons were read in medieval Europe, they had unforeseen consequences. But there is no basis for seeing in early Christian writings on the Jews a portent of the Inquisition or a premonition of the Final Solution. Christianity and Judaism, it must not be forgotten, had a quarrel over the significance of Jesus of Nazareth and the Law. Once Christians embraced Jesus as the Messiah and dispensed with the authority of the Law, it was inevitable that Jews, who continued to live by the Law, would be the object of criticism. It was the spiritual challenge of a vibrant Judaism that spawned sermons and treatises against the Jews. It is perhaps too much to ask that a writer who consciously overheats his language to arouse the emotions of his readers show some sensitivity to the polemical rhetoric of another age.

Carroll makes the novel, but unhistorical, claim that with the conversion of Constantine the Cross of Christ replaced the life of Christ in the Christian imagination, and that this set Christians decisively against the Jews. As evidence he notes that the original Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) did not have the words "was crucified" and "died" under Pontius Pilate. What Carroll overlooks is that these phrases occur in almost all early Christian creeds (and in the New Testament), and it is a historical accident that the creed on which Nicaea was based did not include the words "was crucified." Yet Carroll imposes a wholly wilful interpretation on the additions made at the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). The difference, he writes, "marks a turning point in our inquiry," for now the Son of God came "not to be one of us, not to take on the human condition," but "in order to be crucified." The shift set in motion a dynamic that will "keep Jews at the heart of a quickened, and quickly armed [!], Christian hatred."

But this is pure fantasy, and the reckless use of the term "armed" is an example of Carroll's reliance on innuendo to advance his argument. His treatment of the early church shows as little understanding of Christian theology as it

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does of the social setting of early Christian writings against the Jews. The leitmotif of early Christian thought is precisely that the devine Son took on our condition in order that we might share in God's life. In the words of Saint Athanasius: "He became man that we might become divine."

The second part of the book is taken up with an extensive description of Christian mistreatment of Jews in the Middle Ages, beginning with the Crusades, then tracing the rise of tales of blood libel, and ending with the forced conversion of Jews during the Inquisition, their expulsion from Spain in 1492, and the establishment of a Jewish ghetto in Rome. Especially in sermons preached in the later Middle Ages, one can see how old stereotypes of the Jews had deadly consequences. It is a sordid tale and the violence of Christians against Jews in the Middle Ages is a very dark chapter in the church's history. It can only fill the Christian reader with sorrow and shame and a yearning for repentance.

Carroll does give space to dissenting voices. He notes that Gregory the Great opposed the forced conversion of Jews, that Bernard of Clairvaux spoke out against attacks on the Jews, and that certain bishops valiantly strove to protect the Jews from the passions of the populace. But Carroll seems always to opt for the most malign interpretation and to claim that theological grounds were used to justify whatever Christians did. What I find most puzzling is Carroll's strained attempt to trace everything back to the Cross. In one of the most astonishing sections of the book he singles out Anselm of Canterbury for particular censure. Anselm, an early scholastic theologian (1033–1109), was the author of a famous book, *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*, in which he argued that Christ's death was a sacrifice offered by God's perfect son to satisfy divine justice. Anselm's preoccupation with Christ's death leads Carroll to the unsupported conclusion that the death of Christ became the central saving event in Christianity, thereby making the situation of the Jews even more precarious. The point of Anselm's book was to demonstrate according to philosophical reason, that the Incarnation was necessary (hence "Why did God become man?"), and that the redemption of mankind had to take place as presented in the Gospels. Salvation was possible only through the work of one who was at once true God and true man.

It is apparent in Carroll's discussion of Anselm that there is something much deeper at work here than historical explanation. Any teaching, so the argument goes, that rests on the events in the Gospels, as for example the crucifixion of Christ in Jewish Jerusalem, and claims that in Christ's life, death, and Resurrection God was definitively made known, is incurably anti-Semitic. That is really the message of this book, and in an interlude Carroll illustrates the problem with the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

It is this belief, according to Carroll, that is the source of the church's anti-

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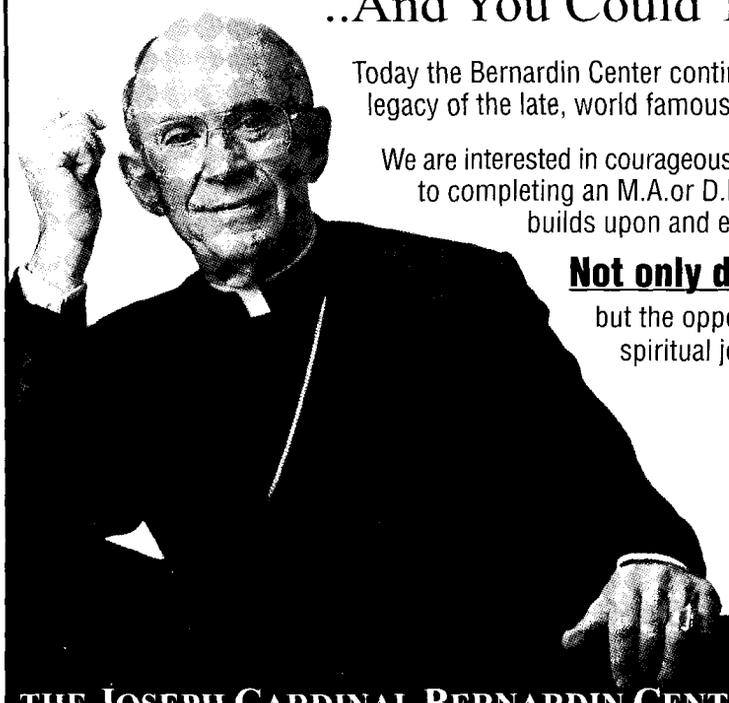

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Semitism, and also the exclusionary creed adopted at Nicaea (because of its assertion that Christ is God), and the triumphalism of Pope Boniface VIII (and John Paul II). With logic such as this it is pointless to argue over the interpretation of persons or events in the Christian past or present. Christians are guilty for being Christians.

The final section of the book deals with the Enlightenment, the nineteenth-century papacy, especially Pius IX, the Dreyfus case in France, German Catholic intellectuals during the rise of Hitler, the reign of Pius XII and the fate of the Jews during World War II, etc. Carroll tells a familiar and now predictable story (for Pius XII he relies heavily on John Cornwell's discredited *Hitler's Pope*). But some material is less familiar, as for example the discussion of Abbot Ildefons Herwegen of the famous Benedictine monastery of Maria Laach in Germany.

According to Carroll, Herwegen was host to a meeting of Catholic scholars that took place at the monastery in the spring of 1933, shortly after the concordat between the Third Reich and the Vatican. Franz von Papen, vice-chancellor of the Reich, was in attendance and the gathering became a celebration of the *Reichskonkordat*. No doubt many of the Catholics who attended were supporters of the Reich, and some were themselves Nazis. The abbot, according to a speech cited by Carroll, gave his blessing to the "new form of the State." Unfortunately, there was no way to verify this report since Carroll bases his account on an unpublished lecture delivered in Poland three years ago.

But granted that the facts are correct, it is not clear what this incident proves except that during the Third Reich Catholics (and other Christians) were complicitous with Nazi authorities. That hardly demonstrates that the "arc" of Christian history "curves from Jesus to the Holocaust." Pusillanimity there certainly was and moral myopia and misguided nationalism, but nothing that gives evidence of theological anti-Semitism. Carroll forces everything through a very particular sieve, or to use his image, all actions that relate to the Jews are seen through the single lens of "religious hatred." "The church's failure to denounce publicly or privately early Nazi violence aimed at Jews...is rooted in the church's own anti-Semitism." There is no question that Christian teaching helped create an environment in which Nazi ideology could take root. For too many centuries Christians had grown accustomed to depicting the Jews as inferior, as adherents of a decadent religion, as the killers of Christ. In the years leading up to the World War II, resistance of Christian leaders to Nazi ideology was often too little and too late. But Nazism was an anti-Christian ideology and something more will be required to draw a direct line from the Gospels to the Final Solution.

Which brings me to Carroll's conclusion. He proposes the convening of a Vatican Council III. This council, he says, will be "centrally Catholic," but will also include "Jews and Protestants, people of other faiths and of no faith, clergy and laity and, emphatically women." One purpose of the council will be for the

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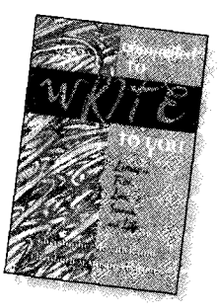

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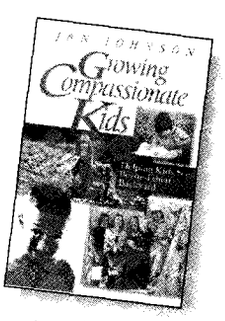

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church to purge itself of the "anti-Jewish consequences of the New Testament." For the church which "betrayed Jesus in the first generation has been betraying him ever since." Repentance not only requires transforming the church into an egalitarian and democratic institution ("conversation is our hope"), it will mean a thorough revision of Christian belief. In particular the church must dismantle the Cross (and by that Carroll means "removing the horizontal beam"), banishing it as a symbol of Christian faith, and abandon her belief that Christ is the savior of the world.

The question of the Jews is only the first item on the agenda. The council must also address the oppression of women, patriarchal autocracy, dishonesty, clericalism, exclusion of the laity in decision making, denominational narcissism, harmful views on sexuality and clerical celibacy, all of which, Carroll believes, stem from the church's theology of the Jewish people. But clearly this catalogue of vices is driven by something more than the church's relation to the Jews. If Carroll is genuinely interested in the church and the Jews, he knows that for almost half a century Christian thinkers, church leaders, and catechists have made extraordinary efforts to come to terms with the "teaching of contempt." Whether one thinks of the decree *Nostra aetate* of Vatican II and other Catholic statements over the last two decades, or the various declarations of the World Council of Churches and Protestant denominations, the depth and seriousness of Christian engagement with Judaism and the Jewish people is unprecedented in Christian history.

In 1980 Pope John Paul II made a historic visit to the Jewish synagogue of Rome where he called the Jews "our dearly beloved brothers," and on his visit to Germany in 1980 he said that the covenant with the people of God is "never revoked by God." Last spring the pope led a service of repentance in Rome in which there was a "confession of sins against the people of Israel," and on his journey to Jerusalem last year he made a pilgrimage to the holiest site of the Jews, the Western Wall of the Temple, and deposited this prayer of confession in a crack in the wall.

Of even greater theological significance, *Nostra aetate* cites Saint Paul's words in Romans 11: "If some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you." At Vatican II it would have been easy to transpose Paul's present tense "support" into the past tense, "supported." It is thus of great significance that when *Nostra aetate* paraphrases Paul's words it retains the present tense. The church received the revelation of the Old Testament from the Jewish people, and she "cannot forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been engrafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles." One might have expected, two thousand years later, to read, "drew sustenance" from the Jewish people. But what the decree says is, "draws suste-

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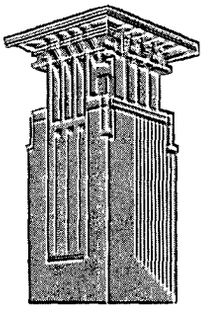
nance from the root of that good olive tree." In these few lines the council laid to rest "supersessionism," the theological idea that Christianity has replaced Judaism.

Constantine's Sword is behind the curve of history. Had this book been written fifty years ago it would have been noteworthy. But its message has been heard, digested, and acted upon. And the new openness of the church to the Jews has led to a dramatic transformation of relations between Jews and Christians. Just this last year a group of Jewish thinkers produced a remarkable document the first ever by Jews on Christianity and one that would have been inconceivable before the developments within Christian thinking a generation ago. Titled "A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity," it speaks directly to Carroll's concerns:

"Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi exterminations of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians. We recognize with gratitude those Christians who risked or sacrificed their lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. With that in mind, we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people. We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for the sins committed by their ancestors."

Carroll knows about the church's response over the last generation to its dealings with the Jews in the past, but deems it insufficient. He will not be satisfied until the "foundational assumptions of Christian faith" are challenged. The "entire structure of the Gospel narrative," he says, "is unworthy of the story it wants to tell." The church must free itself from any claim that "salvation, redemption, grace, perfection" have come in Christ. Coincidentally I read these words two days after hearing the epistle from the Mass on Christmas Eve: "For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men. . . " (Titus 2:11). For Carroll repentance can only mean renunciation of Christ and of Christian faith, as he puts it, repentance "without Golgotha, redemption or sacrifice."

At the end of the day, in spite of the enormous effort to lay bare the sins of the church over two millennia, *Constantine's Sword* is not really a book about Christian theology of the Jews. Its subject is Christian theology *tout court* and its polemic springs from the currently fashionable "ideology of religious pluralism," what might be termed horror at strong opinions. Carroll wants a Christianity that celebrates a "Jesus whose saving act is only disclosure of the divine love available to all," and calls for a pluralism of "belief and worship, of religion and no religion, that honors God by defining God as beyond every human



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effort to express God." What we have then is a rather conventional cultural critique of Christianity. The Jews are the victims par excellence of the excesses of revealed religion. But what Carroll forgets is that the Jews too believe in revelation. If Christians, on the basis of the Scriptures and Christian tradition, cannot confess Jesus as Lord, can the Jews, on the basis of the Scriptures and Jewish tradition, claim that they are the elect people of God? In Carroll's brave new world there will be neither Jews nor Christians. □

Robert Louis Wilken, *the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia, is the author of* The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought *(Yale University Press), and* Remembering the Christian Past *(Eerdmans).*

FEEL, THRILL, WEEP

Do Not Go Gentle
My Search for Miracles in a Cynical Time
Ann Hood
Picador, USA, $23, 256 pp.

Anita Mathias

Teach us to care and not to care,
Teach us to sit still
Our peace in His will.

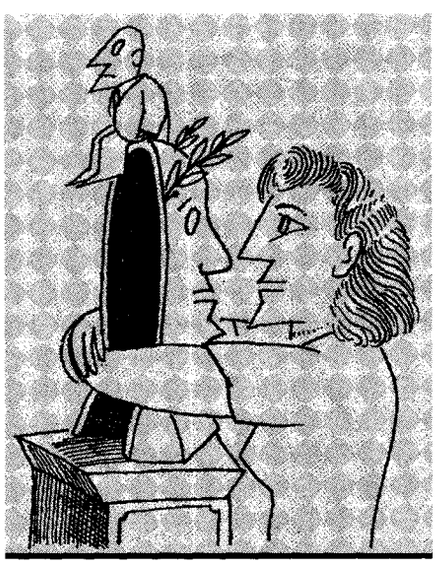
In "Ash Wednesday," T.S. Eliot describes the perfection of faith.

When a loved family member lies dying, that serene relinquishment is not easy to achieve. Faith can then become a kind of wrestling, a desire to wrest Lazarus from the jaws of implacable fate by brute will. Ann Hood's memoir *Do Not Go Gentle: My Search for Miracles in a Cynical Time* limns this exhausting odyssey.

When her sixty-seven-year old father is diagnosed with lung cancer, Hood decided "to get him a miracle." She goes to El Santuario de Chimayo, in New Mexico, to pray that his tumor would vanish. It does, but then, in one of the bewildering twists not unfamiliar in the life of faith, her father dies of fungal pneumonia.

The shock of this apparently divine betrayal is amplified by the earlier death of her only brother who, following arguments with his estranged wife, and then his soon-to-be wife, drowns in a bathtub. When, soon after the death of her father, Hood has a second miscarriage, the powerlessness of sheer grief plunges her into despair. "I became immobilized by my sadness. I believed in absolutely nothing at all." The loss of faith left her "deadened" by "dark numbness."

Funded by a book advance and glossy magazine work, Hood travels searching for evidence of miracles that might help her believe in God. She introduces us to much of the colorful efflorescence of Catholicism, including Guadalupe, where she sees the sun's rays form a cross, and Padre Pio's tomb. In Worcester, Massachusetts, she visits "Little Audrey," a teenage "victim's soul" in a coma, who lies surrounded by osmo-



genesia, the odor of roses, weeping statues, and Communion hosts flecked with blood. Despite the Catholic church's protests, thousands of visitors pray *to* Little Audrey, rather than *for* her. Seeking to be spiritually moved, Hood visits Joan of Arc's birthplace; Rocamadour in the Dordogne; and Mont Saint Michel in Normandy. She weeps before a veil of the Virgin in Chartres, "spiritually stirred" at last. Hood's is not the absolute faith of Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him," nor the rationalist creed of Thomas, "Unless I see and touch, I will not believe," but a narcissistic, emotional creed—"Unless I *feel* and *thrill* and *weep*, I will not believe."

Finally, Hood decides that, since she absorbed her faith unquestioningly from her Italian Catholic family, she might be able to resuscitate her faith by visiting her ancestral village in Italy. She describes her family with a quote from Rudolph Vecoli, "Italian Catholics are only nominally Catholic. Theirs is a folk religion, a fusion of animism, polytheism, and sorcery, with the sacraments of the church thrown in." (In fact, Hood's own faith, with its reliance on symbolic dreams, omens, psychics, tarot cards, and healing candles strikes me as positioned somewhere between the Dark Ages and the New Age.) This trip works. When an old relative advises her in clichés—"You have to have faith for prayer and healing to work," and "Saint Anthony will help you find your way home"—she cries hard, feeling convicted. Soon afterwards, the familiar twentieth-century miracle of finding a lost contact lens restores her longed-for faith.

I remember reading the nucleus of this book as an article in *Doubletake* magazine. The present narrative is undermined by the attempt to inflate an essay into a book. *Do Not Go Gentle* evolves into a family memoir, a popular genre in an increasingly rootless and isolated America. Hood gives us the history of each parent's family, and is especially deft in describing her abusive grandmother, revealing the petty verbal abuse that often lurks beneath the shiny exterior of the large happy family.

More than anything, the book is a testimony to the therapeutic and palliative

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effects of time and travel. Travel plunges you into a new setting, filling you with fresh ideas. In this new way of existence, the griefs of your old world seem less sharp and poignant. Gradually, time blunts the edge of Hood's sorrow and she comes to accept a lonelier world "whose common theme is the death of fathers."

Ann Hood calls this book "a spiritual odyssey." Unfortunately, her story ends where real spiritual adventure begins: she decides that God exists, that God is benign, that there can be power in prayer. This is tame stuff compared to *The Seven Storey Mountain* or *Surprised by Joy*, whose electrifying apprehension of the holy leaves us with a gasping hunger to follow. Thomas Merton, C.S. Lewis, Pascal, and Augustine dive from Scripture into the deep sea of God. The response of these writers to God is quirky and individual; yet, since their quests begin by grappling with the story that culminates in the radiant figure of Christ, their journeys offer wisdom and illumination to anyone who wants to dive into the same sea. If Ann Hood sought comfort or light in the concentrated wisdom of Scripture at any point along her search, it does not show. With an irritating self-absorption, she seeks to base her faith on "spiritual stirrings," intuitions, flickers of emotion—private stars with a private light with little general significance.

Do Not Go Gentle is a lively, gracefully written memoir, full of vivid descriptions of the beautiful places in which—possibly, not coincidentally—people have experienced miracles. It is a pleasure to read. To my husband's despair, I took notes for future vacations. But finally I was more amused than inspired by the self-indulgence and emotionalism of this very American spiritual quest. For a guide on my own "spiritual odyssey," I think I'll stick with Merton or Thomas à Kempis, and, even better, the Word that was in the beginning. □

Anita Mathias *wrote "I Was a Teenage Atheist" in* Commonweal's *October 8, 1999 issue. It was selected for inclusion in* The Best Spiritual Writing, 2000, *Philip Zaleski, ed., HarperSanFrancisco.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

passions to win political support. The columns of several highly respected Republican pundits read like James Baker's press statements. Most alarming, their treatment of Jesse Jackson's orderly protests seemed to suggest that any time an African American speaks forcefully about civil rights concerns to other blacks a riot has taken place. On the other hand, they uniformly defended the conduct of the congressional staffers and others sent to Florida to stop the recount.

There was something frightening about the bullyboy tactics of the imported demonstrators and the consistent liberties that Baker and his surrogates took with the truth. The politics of resentment created something almost akin to what Adorno called the authoritarian personality. This mindset seemed to legitimize in-

(Continued on page 30)

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(Continued from page 29)

timidating black voters, doctoring absentee ballot applications in Seneca and Martin Counties, the reckless purging of voter rolls to reduce the number of black voters, and the stonewalling of the Florida secretary of state's office. The GOP chairperson of one Florida county told the *New York Times* that "our lives" were at stake. In cultural warfare, the stakes seem that great and call for extraordinary exertion that sometimes crosses the bounds of civility and lawfulness.

After Bush became president-elect, Rush Limbaugh angrily dismissed suggestions that Republicans should turn away from an "orgy of hate" to seek conciliation and pursue moderation. He noted that it was anger that finally brought the party control of the presidency and both houses of Congress. These tactics are very effective, but they also damage the fabric of our system.

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APSED CATHOLICS

Edward P. Echlin

The Cathedral of Our Lady at Chartres rises like a crown at the edge of the plain of Beauce. Below lie suburban sprawl, motorways, and the remaining wheat fields of the Ile de France, the golden granary of Paris. Chartres is a massive profession of faith of a medieval people, and of their descendants, who preserved it. The cathedral is known for its influence on High Gothic, its flying buttresses, ribbed vaults, and multiple towers; for glass and carvings that pray and teach down the centuries. The latter testify to medieval devotion to Mary and to her son, to faith in the God incarnate. And, of course, there is the sheer numinosity of the place, from a distance but especially within, its colored glass changing with the sun and the seasons.

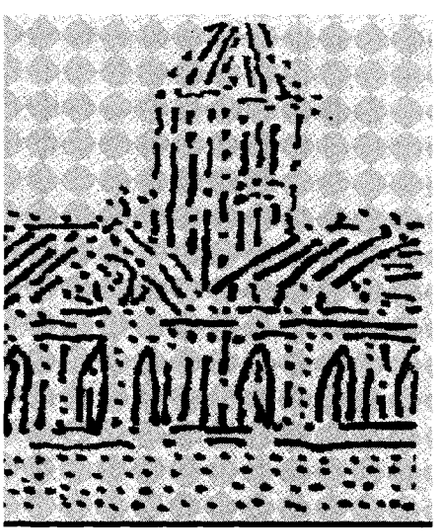
For theologians there is yet more. Henri de Lubac wrote that medieval exegesis "found expression not only in literature but in art, evincing a marvelous power and fecundity." When Chartres rose, a great episcopal school existed in its precincts. Bishop Fulbert, who built an earlier church—whose west front still dazzles pilgrims today—founded the famous Chartres School. It boasted, among others, Ivo the canonist, Bernard, Thierry, and John of Salisbury. The cathedral itself is a theological masterpiece which incorporates the learning of the medieval schools in its resplendent glass and stone. "We are as dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants," wrote Bernard of Chartres, "and can see further than our great predecessors."

These words reflect a theological method from which we can learn today. For the artists, artisans, and scholars of Chartres grounded their work in a living theological tradition, one that flowed from their ancestors, upon whose shoulders they dared to stand. Thus the cathedral's most famous window, "The Root of Jesse" in the northern lancet in the west front, depicts the lineage of David and the Jewish kings, culminating in Mary and Jesus.

For our part, we dwell in what the Jesuit editor of *Theological Studies* recently called a "theological recession." Not all who read this will recall the work of Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Karl Rahner, C.H. Dodd, or Raymond Brown. Chartres teaches us something we need to relearn.

The theology that gave us Vatican II was known as *ressourcement*. This method contemplates the sources of the faith, especially the most intense moments of the living tradition's expression of them, bringing their light to bear on the present time. It is not a repetitive trolling of the receded past, but rather a rediscovery of our ancestral voices: their methods, faith, imagination, and ways of heeding God's disclosure.

In a distinctly medieval way, *ressourcement* was also the method of the theologians, canonists, and craftsmen at Chartres. Indeed, one remarkable window portrays the four evangelists on the shoulders of the great prophets. Enthroned above them are Christ—"the true light that enlightens every man" (John 1:9)—and Mary, who bridges the Old and New Testaments. At Chartres, the two Scriptures flow into one Bible, one salvation history.



Does such instruction apply today? In a world of globalized commerce and cross-cultural migration, is wisdom to be encountered in the other world religions? Look to Chartres: There we find the magisterial, pre-Abrahamic figures Noah and Melchizedek. Even before the promise sworn to Abraham, they encounter and disclose the divine. What about today's troubled families? At Chartres, note the Nativity, Nazareth, and public-life scenes: they are all about family. Without it there would be no childhood of God incarnate, no lessons, learned from relatives, about nature which appear later in Jesus' unforgettable parables.

What about creation itself, redeemed through God's son, and the appalling destruction of our earth today? Look to the ecological theology found in the stone and glass of Chartres: God's rainbow and the lush profusion of plants and animals. In the "Good Samaritan" window, donated by the shoemakers, find Adam, fashioned by God from brown soil, and Eve from his rib. Both are made responsible by their Creator for his garden. And in the central west front portal, where pilgrims are still drawn to the king of the universe, find enthroned the one who creates and continues to sustain all.

We Christians, in theological, familial, and ecological recession, are in need of ancestral shoulders. *Ressourcement* points us to them, to the peaks of theological artistry and poetry that can raise us beyond recession. Chartres, standing like a crown on its plateau, is one such shining peak. □

Edward P. Echlin *is the author of* Earth Spirituality, Jesus at the Center *(Arthur James, 1999).*

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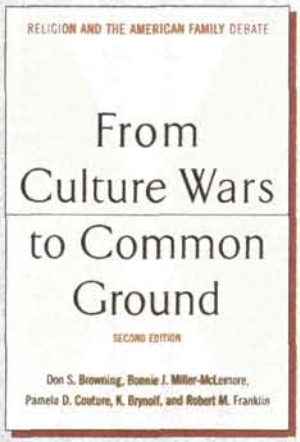
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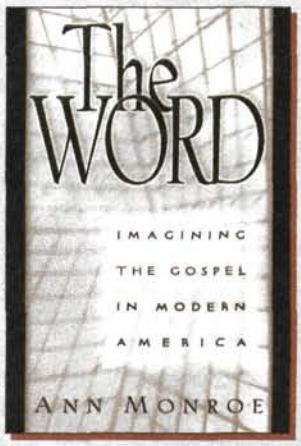

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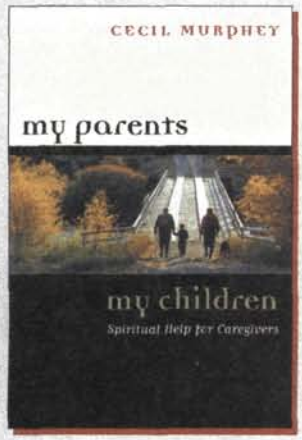

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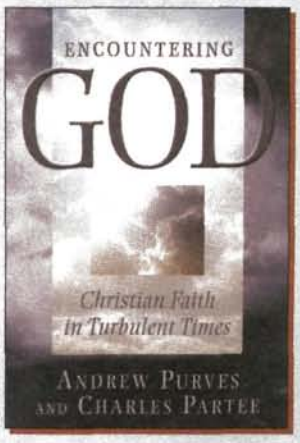

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